

CHAPTER OVERVIEW:

This chapter covers information pertaining to screening reports of abuse/neglect at the county level, to determine whether the Children's Service Worker (CSW) should respond as a family assessment or an investigation.

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- 3.2 Parameters of Investigation Responses
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SCREENING

Reports of child abuse and neglect received by Hotline staff will be forwarded to the respective county office following the normal process. The definitions of abuse and neglect have not changed. However, decisions must be made in regard to how Children's Division (CD) will respond to a report of child abuse or neglect.

3.1 Child Protective Services CPS Screening Classification Form and Protocol

Each county office will be responsible for screening reports received from the Hotline and classifying them as either an Investigation or a Family Assessment. The CPS Screening Classification Form (CS-27) and Protocol are utilized to screen all reports.

3.2 Parameters of Investigation Responses

Investigations are those reports where the acts of the alleged perpetrator, if confirmed, are criminal violations and/or where the action/inaction of the alleged perpetrator may not be criminal, but which if continued, would lead to the removal of the child or the alleged perpetrator from the home.

NOTE: In deciding whether to screen a report for investigation, staff shall consider what will be in the best interest of the child. All reports where the child may need to be removed are not investigations.

Investigations will include:

- All reports of child fatality;

- Reports of serious physical, medical or emotional abuse and serious neglect where criminal investigations are warranted;
- All reports of sexual abuse;
- Reports in which the alleged perpetrator is not a member of the family/household;
- All other reports that do not fall into the above categories but which, if confirmed, would be a violation of the criminal code statutes listed;
- All reports referred to the Out-Of-Home Investigation (OHI) Unit or non-relative/non-household member caretaker(s) reports that are investigated by county staff.

3.3 Parameters of Family Assessment Responses

Family Assessment responses are carefully screened reports of suspected maltreatment. They are reports of mild, moderate, or first-time non-criminal allegations of abuse or neglect, or reports where the only allegation is a threat of serious abuse or neglect if there is no intervention. These will include reports where a law enforcement co-investigation does not appear necessary to ensure the safety of the child.

Family Assessment reports will include:

- Mild, moderate or first-time non-criminal reports of physical abuse or neglect (including medical neglect);
- Mild or moderate reports of emotional maltreatment; and
- Educational neglect reports.

NOTE: While most educational neglect reports will be handled most appropriately through a Family Assessment, this does not preclude staff from referring the information obtained to the school or prosecutor for possible action.
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3.4 Screening Team Judgment/Decision Making

The screening team (or screener) will conduct the screening immediately upon receipt from the Child Abuse Neglect Hotline Unit (CANHU) of the report. Refer to the CPS Screening Classification Protocol (CS-27) for guidelines in completing the screening.

3.5 Checking Prior Reports, Other Systems, Reporters, and Collaterals

The CA/N-1 form transmitted by CANHU will contain information regarding prior CA/N reports, as well as information from other systems, i.e., Income Maintenance, Food Stamps, Child Support Enforcement, etc. The data from CANHU may be based on limited information, therefore, the screener may do a more extensive search for information on any prior reports, including a review of the paper record. The screener may determine it is necessary to contact the reporter, law enforcement, or other collateral to obtain additional information. This is to gather additional information to assist in making the correct assignment, not to ascertain the validity of the report. Refer to the CPS Screening Classification Protocol for more information regarding this step in the screening process.

Review of prior involvement between CD and the family can be useful in assessing chronic problems as well as strengths within the family. The Children's Service Worker should consider the family's prior involvement with CD throughout the screening, assessment, conclusion and treatment planning process.

Preliminary review of prior involvement shall be documented on the CS-27, in section III, "Additional Factors", in the "Explanation" box. During the assessment or investigation phase, more detailed information regarding the family's prior involvement with CD should be obtained by reviewing prior written reports and other information in the family's files.

3.6 Entering Response Information In System

The Screener shall enter the screening information in the system on the same, or the next working day, following receipt of the report. Information from the CS-27 is entered on the CPS Screening Classification Update Screen (ATRU).

This information will assist in evaluating the criteria upon which assignments are made, and the frequency with which changes in response are made.

3.7 Changing Response After Screening

In a small percentage of reports it will be determined that a report screened for a Family Assessment would be more appropriately handled as an Investigation or vice versa. One of the primary goals of Child Protection Practice is to perfect the initial screening function to assure that this transfer is kept to an acceptable minimum. However, some reports will transfer due to information obtained during the Investigation/Family Assessment. The statute requires reports to be transferred, as appropriate. When changes in the response are made they are to be done in the least disruptive way possible for the family and should minimize service delivery interruption.

3.8 Assignment Of Reports For Investigation/Family Assessment

Assignment of reports to staff for investigations and family assessments shall be made based on local protocol. Reports must be assigned in such a way that will ensure all investigations and family assessments are initiated within 24 hours of receipt of the report from the Hotline (or 72 hours in reports of educational neglect).

NOTE: For investigations, every child named as a victim on the CA/N – 1 must be seen face to face within 24 hours. Every child residing in the household must be seen face to face within 72 hours of the report. With reports screened as family assessments, all children listed as victims on the CA/N-1 and every child in the household must be seen within 72 hours. If the worker is unable to ensure safety, face to face contact with all children named as victims on the CA/N-1 must be made within 24 hours.

3.8.1 Things to Consider When Assigning Reports

When reports are assigned, the following should be considered:

- Type of report, i.e., should educational neglect reports be assigned to one staff person who has an on-going working relationship with the school district;
- Geographic considerations, i.e., based on school districts. This may assist in developing a good working relationship with school personnel and may also aid in conserving mileage;
- Whether particular staff has skills in certain areas;
- Staff's familiarity with local resources;
- Caseload size; and
- After-hour assignment.

3.8.2 Initiating the Investigation/Family Assessment Within 24 Hours

For both investigation and family assessment reports, staff are required to initiate the investigation or family assessment within 24 hours of the referral from the Hotline (or 72 hours in educational neglect reports).

Investigations:

For investigation reports, staff must see the alleged child victim(s) in 24 hours, or immediately in emergencies. Reports in which the sole basis for the report is educational neglect, require the worker to have face to face contact within 72 hours. All other children in the household must also be seen within 72 hours

from the receipt of the report. In investigation reports, it is critical to see the child to ensure the child's safety and to document physical evidence. Analysis of the child(ren)'s safety must be documented on the second page of the CPS-1 and the CPS-1A.

Family Assessments:

Family assessments must be initiated within the first 24 hours, however, this initiation may be a contact with the reporter or other person who knows the family situation. If the family/child are not seen within the first 24 hours, as it has been determined that the child is safe in the interim, staff must document what actions and knowledge or information they obtained to ensure the child's safety. Every child listed as an alleged victim on the CA/N-1 and every child living in the household must be seen no later than 72 hours of the report. In cases of alleged physical abuse, it is often difficult to determine severity until the child is actually seen by a professional. This can be documented on the first page of the CPS-1 under Children/Initial Contact.

Interviewing the Child Separately

Staff shall interview the child separately from his/her family when conducting a family assessment. The worker may explain the agency's responsibility to secure information from named participants in the report, along with other persons/facilities, in order to determine safety and complete a thorough assessment. The specific circumstances of the family assessment will dictate whether the child interview will happen before or after the family interview. The private interview with the child does not preclude him/her from the family interview session. If the family refuses to allow a child to be interviewed separately from the family, the report can change tracks and become an investigation. If this track change occurs, the investigation protocols will be followed, including contacting local law enforcement.

If the family knows about the report prior to the face-to-face contact, the worker must be particularly observant of signs that the child(ren) have been coached. Examples of signs may include, but are not limited to the following: the parent speaks for the child; the child looks to parent to respond to question; the child does not respond to detailed question in which they would have information readily available. Any signs of coaching should be documented on the CS-16.

Chief Investigator

New law introduces and identifies the role of a **Chief Investigator**. The Division director shall name at least one Chief Investigator in each county CD office. The person(s) in each county office who is responsible for supervising staff responding to hotline reports shall be considered a Chief Investigator. Each county must develop procedures to ensure the tasks listed below are completed by the Chief Investigator, or substitute, in the Chief Investigator's absence.

Substitutes might include the circuit manager, social work specialist, or other experienced supervisor.

Within 72 hours of receiving a hotline report, the Chief Investigator will review, the first two pages of the CPS-1 and sign, and date the CPS-1A. The Chief Investigator is expected to communicate with the worker to discuss the case whenever possible. County offices must develop local protocol to ensure required information obtained for reports received on weekends and holidays is made available to the Chief Investigator for review within 72 hours of the report.

Tasks of the Chief Investigator include:

Verifying the report was appropriately screened as an investigation or family assessment;

Verifying, within 72 hours of the report, that all children in the household have been seen;

Verifying reporter contact was initiated;

Verifying that any history the family has had with the agency is considered as it relates to the hotline report and/or the overall assessment of the family;

Supporting the workers as they establish and maintain relations with multidisciplinary team members; and

Ensuring information regarding the status of reports, when the report involves a child enrolled in school, is provided to the **public school district liaison** (described in the following text). Should the subject child attend a nonpublic school, the principal of that school will be notified of the report.

Related Subject: Chapter 1, of this section, Attachment C, Transfer of Reports
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3.8.3 CA/N Reports on Open Family-Centered Services (FCS) Cases

Child Abuse/Neglect (CA/N) reports received on an open FCS case will be screened as either an investigation or a family assessment, as appropriate. The Children's Service Worker assigned to the FCS case or another Children's Service Worker can conduct the investigation/family assessment.